Mortality

And Other Poems

Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff

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MORTALITY

And Other Poems

BY

BLANCHE SHOEMAKER WAGSTAFF

(Mrs. Donald Carr)

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To the memory of my Mother

98059

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Mortality

MORTALITY

None shall penetrate the mask . . .
Until the last long desperate breath
Until the last symphony is sounded
I shall go smiling
Into the great beyond,
Looking upon the silence as release
Looking upon the darkness as a dream,
Looking upon the deep unknown as rest . . .

There will be none to know . . .
The infinite impassioned silence
Will hold me fast—
The passionate solitude of my soul
Will be unbroken to the end.

Gayly I went
With laughter on my lips
(Tears but a hidden truth)
And when the long night covers me
Youth will be calling in my veins . . .
Love will be reveller in my dreams . . .
Beauty will be my body's pyre
Remembering all the lone, the long,
The easeless years that are no more . . .

It will be good
To join hands once again with silence
(Silence from which I came)
Calm easeful silence like a mother's breast,
And to depart from all this lurid life
So sharp, so bitter and so unbenign;
Oh, who would miss the cymbal-sound
Down the long peaceful way of death?

Heart, there is nothing left for your desire . . .
All things have been possessed . . .
All gifts, all joys,
All twinging pleasures and all beautiful sorrows.

None shall penetrate the mask . . .
Unbroken to the end . . .
Unto the last, immitigable hour
When silence will enfold me once again.

Earth My Lover

A Sonnet Sequence

SPRING

I took the earth for lover in the Spring.
Men's kisses wearied me; and so I lay
Beneath a hawthorn tree in budding May
And heard the boughs above a bridal sing,
The leaves and blossoms round me quivering.
And in this secret solitude the gray
Years swept from me in some strange magic way,
And lo, my body was a wondrous thing!

Close-clasped in an inviolable embrace
The soft cool earth with passionate kisses clung,
The wild, hard fingers of each woodland thing
The moss and briers meeting around my face,
My sharp delight from earth's caresses wrung,
I took the earth for lover in the Spring.

APRIL

I would be glad of life even for these:
The Spring, when amber willows are in bloom,
The young moon risen like a silvery plume
In opal skies, star-tinted. Through the trees
A blue bird's note at twilight; on the breeze
The echo of the sea's impassioned boom,
A flash of lightning through the pine-tree gloom
Cloud-shadows passing with the Pleiades . . .

I would be glad of life for April rain,
Sweet-smelling earth, a quiet templed wood,
Green vines on ruined towers by the sea,
And meadows glowing with the golden grain,
Moonrise upon a mountain solitude,
Man needs no other immortality!

MAY

This little hour between the dawn and night
A rainbow bringing beauty for a space
A wonderment that holds me in embrace
Lingering an instant in the fading light.
How beautiful and fair, how wondrous bright
This precious interval, this quiet place
Of flowers and of fragrance and of grace
Before shall fall the darkness on my sight . . .

So is love's way; the Spring; youth in my heart,
All rose-leaf loveliness that dwells an hour
All sweet and perfect things that take
their flight—
A moment and their beauty will depart—
The tremulous blossom of a Maytime flower
Drowned in the awful and unending night.

JUNE

These hills in June wear wonder like a crown,
  Green glowing loveliness of field and vale,
  Glad riches of the earth, white clouds that sail
In azure, apple-blossoms blowing down,
Valleys that glimmer softly golden-brown;
  Wide-spreading boughs and meadows blooming pale,
  Blue spruce and evergreen, an emerald trail—
These hills in June wear wonder like a crown!

A vista of the infinite, the blue
  Imperishable temple of the hills
    Where sky and woodland meet in wide embrace,
This loveliness of earth forever new
  The beauty which a heavenly artist spills—
    These hills that mirror God's eternal face!

MIDSUMMER

The wind is gone; the sun has fallen to rest.
A lingering light upon the meadows still,
A violet dusk is tremulous on the hill,
The blue-jay settles in its shaded nest,
Tranquil the azure scene; night's ebon breast
Is pierced with stars; a late thrush sends its trill
Over the drowsing marsh; the whippoorwill
Murmurs a mournful music in the west.

Serene the evening comes with delicate hands,
Silver and crystal-clear; and tenderly
A white moon lingers in a fragile cloud.
It is the bridal hour, when evening stands
Waiting her lover darkness down the lea,
While in the wood a night-owl calls aloud.

JULY

Give me the patience of the silent hills,
The green, calm hills that watch beneath the sky,
Grave vigils keeping as the years go by,
Unmoved by storm or wind, when winter spills
Its snowy flood. O tranquil trees and rills!
I would be like your majesty of green
Through life's vicissitudes to dwell serene.
Give me the patience of the silent hills.

O noble contours, mighty glades that peer
Upward to where the sunlight gleams on high,
Companions of the cloud, friend of the star,
Bride of the moon, in azure regions clear,
Give me the silence of the vaulted sky,
The patient fortitude that dwells afar.

Deep falls the sable curtain of the night.
The moon, a silvery arc, is in the west;
The meadow-lark goes softly to its nest;
Around the mountain clings a rosy light.
Evening is come in silence, swift and white
Sandalled in silver. Day has gone to rest.
Quick winds are quivering from the woodland's breast
And in the crystal sky a cloud takes flight.

It is the hour of silence over all,
Rainbow and rose, an alabaster sky,
And little rivers sparkling on their way,
The dark, a shadowy mantle magical,
The great hills in majestic beauty lie.
It is the end, the quiet end of day . . .

SEPTEMBER

O earth, you are too beautiful this hour:
  Autumn upon the hills in crimson fire,
  Great winds in choral anthems like a lyre,
Blue haze upon the valley, golden flower,
And blood red ivy on an ancient tower.
  Banners of leafy purple flaunting higher
  To where the sunset rainbow flames expire
And yellow roses in a ghostly bower.

O earth, I know not how to tell your glory,
  I am bewildered by your loveliness:
    The wonder of this shining autumn day,
The wonder of this old recurrent story,
  The wonder of this luminant caress—
    The ancient beauty lit upon my way.

OCTOBER

Because I saw a black oak on the hill
  Which many hundred years had met the day
  My heart this evening hour has learned to pray
And beauty does my wondering spirit fill.
These ancient boughs that bend above the rill,
  This thing of time's creation gaunt and gray,
  These are a part of the eternal way,
A mighty manner and a wondrous will.

A tree is time's own handiwork and well
  It speaks the glory of unaging earth,
    An intimation of a deathless goal.
It is divinity made visible,
  Nor do I doubt of man's transcendent birth—
    For this I know my own immortal soul.

NOVEMBER

These woods are wintry now, that yesterday
  Wore rainbow garments and a crimson crown
    Their bannered glory is blown forever down.
The sunset stain is now a silver gray
  And twilight has a melancholy way.
    The fluttering leaves are all a dismal brown,
The lowering heavens wear a dreary frown:
  Where has it gone, the bloom of brilliant May?

These woods have trumpet winds that sing of storm.
  The naked trees are black against the sky.
    This is a temple desolate of all:
Only the dust which keeps the gray earth warm,
  Dust where the vanished ages sleeping lie
    From which all comes, into which all things fall.

MIDWINTER

I am in love with darkness, all dark things,
  Dark pines at sunset dyed in sable flame,
  And sombre shadows that with twilight came,
Deep darksome moments which the nightfall brings
That curl about me with strange shadowings,
  Hid pools that harbor wild things without name,
  All wild strange, pluméd things the forests claim,
And midnight when the dreary hoot-owl sings.

I am in love with darkness mournfully,
  Black bats that flutter desolate through space,
    Drear unlit marges where the ravens brood,
Dark clouds that lower in a stormy sea,
  The ebon beauty of night's wondrous face,
    The mistress of my passionate solitude.

Pagan Airs

"Di pensier in pensier,
Di monte in monte,
Mi guida Amor."

Petrarch.

"LIKE WELL-WATER, LOVE, ARE YOU"

Like well-water, Love, are you,
Mirroring the heaven's blue,
Cool and sweet with fragrance, too.

Beauty in a silvery cup
When with laughter you look up;

Oh, what depths of shining gold
In your eyes I do behold;

Mirroring the heaven's blue,
Cool and sweet with fragrance, too,
Like well-water, Love, are you.

ANOMALY

His step sends me trembling
  With passionate fear.
Yet if he came not
  Year upon year . . .

His voice is a strange thing
  Of terror and pain.
Yet if I heard it not
  Ever again . . .

His body is a cruel thing
  Torturesome, bright,
Yet if I held it not—
  How lone the night!

His love is a heavy thing
  Bringing me tears.
Yet if I owned it not—
  Through the dark years!

EBB-TIDE

Wither me
As a burnt stalk,
As charred wood
Or as a bough
Bent down by the wind . . .

Still within me
This surge of sap
By some transcendent ardor,
Some great suffusion.

Leave me
As a marsh at ebb-tide,
Or as a dried leaf
Broken by storm.

ARMOR

"Joys laugh not.
Sorrows weep not."
Blake.

When sorrow dwelt near
My laughter rang free.
It was the armor that I wore
So none might see.

I went forth smilingly
Day after day.
"Her heart is glad and free,"
My friends would say.

But now that joy has come
(Content is mine)
Gravely I go
And make no sign,

For beauty and delight
Are sacred things . . .
(When the heart kneels
It never sings.)

CHOICE

Your love for me
  Is a shining thing.
It is the music of the birds
  In Spring.

My love for you
  Is deep as a river bed.
It is the quiet of the stars.
  It is my daily bread.

Oh, which is best:
  Bread, or song?
Bread is life; but who would not dance
  To music all day long?

BEGGAR

Had I not loved you,
A crown for me, they said.
Great paths of splendor,
Song, a rose-bed.

Had I not loved you,
Rich gifts for me, they said.
(Oh, rather love's white raiment,
And a beggar's bread!)

We are one . . .
Merged, confluent, as two rivers in a sea.
You are a part of me
And I am part of you.
The Great Creative Will is done,
I am drawn through
Your body as a living stream,
In every vein I feel
The forces of your being steal,
In every nerve you dwell
Inviolable.
The current of the dream
Swells like a tide
And cleaves us . . . At your side
I know no otherness. You are
Merged in me like a sunken star
In the enfolding sea,
Clasped, molded into me.

O love, in the divine embrace
Face upon face,
We are one being, one desire,
Our bodies instruments of fire
In an immortal hour
Of ecstasy and power!

We are one . . .
Cleaved, confluent, as two rivers in a sea.
I am part of you and you are part of me,
The Great Creative Will is done.

"DEATH HAS NO FEAR"

Death has no fear.
  There is another thing:
If I should no more hear
  My lover's voice in the Spring . . .

Death has no fear.
  But if I should no more see
At day's end, his face
  Coming towards me.

Death has no fear.
  It is something more:
If I should never again hear
  His footstep at my door!

ANNIVERSARY

You steadfast ever,
As a great river.
Gentle and true
As the sky's blue,
Sweet and sound
As the firm ground.
Tempered as steel
Fine-wrought, real,
My beloved other
Self; sister, brother,
There are none
Staunch as you but the sun;
Earth, moon, star,
All things you are:
Perfect part of me—
Self in eternity.

"AS DUST TO THE EARTH"

I shall call for you ever
  Unto the end . . .
I shall cling as leaves cling to a bough
  No storm can bend.

I shall call for you ever
  Unto the last hour.
I shall cleave to you as dust to the earth,
  As pollen to a flower.

I shall be yours forever.
  And you shall be mine.
There will be nothing can take you from me, never
  A way or a sign.

I shall cling to you ever
  As ivy clings to a wall.
Death may come to sever—
  That is all.

DEAD DAYS

Dead days call to me
  Throughout the years,
Dead days summon me
  In mist and tears.

Dead days once again
  Rise from the vast,
Dead rapture, old pain—
  From the dear past.

Dead hours reach to me
  Their ghostly hands,
Dead joys murmuring
  From vanished lands.

These are my legacy
  Throughout the years—
Dead days calling me
  In mist and tears . . .

OLD AND YOUNG LOVE

Young love lightly goes
  So white and fair;
Old love, a blown rose
  Of memory aware.

Young love, flame and fire,
  Song in its heart;
Old love in grave attire
  Still and apart . . .

Young love spreading wing
  Dreams of the stars;
Old love a sacred thing
  Proud of time's scars.

"I WOULD NOT BE TAME"

I would not be tame
  As other women are,
Fixed to the same
  Unchanging star.

Year after year
  I watch them go—
No great sins or sorrows
  Do they know.

For I am wild
  And very strange.
I must have beauty
  And quick change.

The surge of surf
  Is in my veins,
I shall never know calm
  Or binding chains.

Like a swift white gull
  I must go—
Wild and free, and bold
  Where great winds blow!

SHADOW

I have put away to-night
My girlhood gleaming, white,
Garmented in candlelight.

Because I saw two lovers go
Where the midnight breezes blow
Down a path I used to know.

And I saw them dreaming stand
Tenderly sweet hand-in-hand
Gazing on a wonderland,

And I knew that nevermore
Would I part the magic door
Of youth's gold enchanted store.

I will go still and apart,
Memory aching in my heart
Where the quiet shadows start.

HERITAGE

Love can never still in me
  The ancient fire—
Helen, Läis, Sappho,
  I am their desire.

Not a hundred lovers
  Nor their sharp embrace,
Nor the awful meeting
  Of Beauty, face to face.

The need of all women
  Dwells in my blood,
The thirst of all ages,
  The burden of womanhood . . .

Not Phaon's kisses
  Nor Paris' desire
Could still in my being
  The ancient fire!

TRANSIENS

"Nothing ever is,—but is becoming."
Plato.

All things I have known
  Summer on the sea,
Roses in the moonlight blown
  On a windy lea,—

Lips of my lover
  Tenderly on mine,—
Beauty, desire and rest,
  A star's white sign,

Oh, what meaning have they,
  Love, a spray-tossed wave?
(Beauty is soon forgotten
  In the quiet grave . . .)

FLIGHT

What strange sweet thing
  Has left my heart—
A bird's voice in the Spring
  A star's bright dart,—

The closing of a door—
  A perished light,
A note that sings no more
  In the soft night.

Still is my heart,
  What wild sweet thing
Beautiful as a bird—
  No more takes wing?

FICKLE

I shall forget
  All your loving words,
For Spring is in the meadow
  And the song of birds.

I shall forget
  The happy tears I shed,
For the willow-boughs are golden
  And the maple-buds are red.

I shall forget
  All the love we knew,
For the thrush is calling
  And the hills are blue.

I shall forget
  When softly I hear
The white feet of April
  Drawing near.

Green Mountain Songs

"I linger yet with Nature, for the night
Hath been to me a more familiar face
Than that of man . . . "

Byron

RETURN

"L'amor di quel ch'io parlo, in alto aspira."
Michael Angelo

I have come back to the hills again
From the city's toil and stress,
I have forsaken the ways of pain
To find my happiness.

I have come back to the hills again
To God's great open blue,
Where the winds sweep and the streams leap
And the earth is good and true.

I have come back to the hills again
To find my motherland,
And to hear the bluebird's glad refrain
Where the pine-trees stately stand.

I have come back to the hills again,
To the peaks that pierce the sky,
To the white birch singing in the rain
On snowy summits high.

I have come back to the hills again
To find my God anew.
For the world's ways are not my ways
And the love of the hills is true!

THE GLAD GREEN WAY

When I go up the glad green way
  That leads me to the hills,
When I shall see the bloom of May
  Which all the valley fills,

When I go up the glad green way
  Through meadows gleaming white,
Through aisles of apple-blossoms gay
  And cherry boughs a-light,

When I go up the glad green way
  Through valleys flower-shod
Unto the blooming hills of May
  Then I shall walk with God.

RIVERS THROUGH THE SNOW

I never knew a sound so sweet
As water rippling at my feet.

A singing freshet in the snow
Where mighty hemlock boughs hang low.

The darkness softly quivering
With music from a bubbling spring.

And whispered words of golden sound
Spread like a symphony around.

The night is filled with music rare
O beauty borne upon the air!

No jewelled lute has tongue so sweet
As water rippling at my feet . . .

MOUNTAIN POOLS

Little pools that hold the sky
Smiling as I pass them by.

In the meadows green and bright
They are shining day and night.

Dawn is laughing in their deep
And the purple mists of sleep.

Stars and sunshine kiss them, too,
Just as tender lovers do.

Little mirrors shimmering
With the rainbow-hue of spring,

And sometimes I seem to see
God's own self look out at me!

PATHS

Quiet paths of the wood,
They are my spirit's solitude.

Winding in the silvery rain
Like a shadowy, sinuous chain,

Sunlight never enters there
Only dreamless drifting air,

Sepulchre it is of Spring.
No buds bloom, no birds sing.

Only silence like a pall,
Keeps a vigil over all.

(Quiet paths of the wood
They are my spirit's solitude.)

GREEN AISLES

Green aisles of glory
Swaying in the sun,
Green banks of rivers
Where wild waters run.

Green aisles of meadow
Like an infinite sea—
Banners of blossom
Waving over me.

Green aisles of woodland
Magic carpet spread;
Blue misted heavens
Domed overhead.

Green aisles of blooming
Spreading over earth—
Miracle of Springtime—
Miracle of birth.

"CALM AS THE BLUE"

Calm as the blue of the mountain
  Is my heart today;
Song, like a dancing fountain,
  Fills me with mirth of May.

Still and white is the birch-glade
  High on the wooded crest;
Peace, like the golden forest shade,
  Folds me to its breast.

No more the tempest blowing,
  The calm hills tower green,
Like a quiet river flowing
  My heart, serene.

RAIN: DORSET

The rain is a refuge where I hide,
It folds me in a silver tide.

I hear the music of its fall,
An aria sweet and magical
That trembles softly over all.

I have no fear these glistening hours
In the embrace of singing showers,
And perfume of innumerable flowers.

Life and the world are far away,
Enchantment holds me in its sway,
The rainfall has a magic way.

I watch the great clouds come and go,
Like ghostly barges to and fro,
And their serenity I know.

The rain is a refuge where I hide,
It folds me in a silver tide.

THE LONE PINE SPEAKS

I have no brother on the plain,
Only the kisses of the rain.

Through sun and storm I stand alone
By all the winds of heaven blown.

When Spring festoons the fields in May
She brings me leafy garments gay.

The birds within my boughs keep tryst,
I shelter them from storm and mist.

The friendly sun and breeze caress
The vigil of my loneliness.

And when the moon is risen white
The voice of lovers in the night.

I have no brother on the plain
Only the kisses of the rain.

AUTUMN—WEST ROAD

The hayload wanders down the lane.
(Autumn, have you come back again?)

The bees make music in the vine.
(Autumn, is this your ancient sign?)

The maple-boughs are turning red.
(Autumn, is golden Summer dead?)

The birds go earlier to their nest.
(Autumn, I feel your sad unrest.)

The dusk falls quick in silver mist.
(Autumn, your hills are amethyst.)

The wind is cool this twilight hour.
(Autumn, the dahlias are in flower.)

The moon rides like a snowy bark.
(Autumn, your kisses through the dark!)

QUIET

Quiet is music to me . . . hours that fall
In an inviolate silence over all,
Quiet that holds me like a leafy wall . . .

Quiet of stars; of woods when winds are still;
Quiet of summer fields where no birds trill,
Quiet of snow-fall on a pine-clad hill.

Quiet of love when time has stilled its fears,
Quiet of every woman's hidden tears,
Quiet of wisdom, garnered through the years.

POSSESSIONS

Nothing can take from me
The bloom of apple-tree,
The flowering sod,
The clouds, white ladders up to God,
The tulips pink and red,
The cherry blossoms' spread,
The jonquils' quivering gold,
All loveliness the earth will hold
In Spring's fair hour
When field and wood are turning into flower.

Oh, I am free
To hold forever unto me
These perfect things:—
An April bird that sings,
The scented bloom
Of earth's enchanted room,
Spring's wonder spread,
On field and river bed,
My dear possessions till the end
Though all pass from me, lover and friend.

SUNSET—EQUINOX

The sun is a rose
    That flowers in the west.
Twilight is the hour
    I love best.

The lake is gray
    With birds in flight.
Softly close
    The wings of night.

The shore is pale
    In gathering mist.
The evening clouds
    Are amethyst.

Lavender and rose,
    The west a-flower—
Be glad, my heart,
    In beauty's hour.

GRAY DAY

Gray day, I love you best
When the clouds are in the west,
And the hills are wreathed in mist
Where the clouds have kissed.

Gray day, I love your sky
When the great clouds lowly lie,
And the valley stretches pale
In a winding veil.

Gray day, comrade mine,
You are a silvery sign,
You are a vision from afar
From some hidden star.

Gray day, I love your mood,
Your wistful, wondering solitude.
Gray day, I love you best,
You bring me rest.

COWBELLS

The tinkle of the cowbells,
  Oh, I shall hear no more
When evening comes up golden
  Beside my cottage door.

A happy little melody
  That sings at end of day
The twilight sound of cowbells
  A joyous roundelay.

The mist upon the mountain,
  The shadows as they fall;
The moon an arc of silver,
  The crickets as they call.

The tinkle of the cowbells,
  Serene and sweet and clear,
Oh, I shall miss their music
  When I am far from here.

Amidst the city's fever
  In some light-fretted tower
Oh, I shall dream of cowbells
  At every twilight hour.

GREEN GLADES

Crowds . . .
I am afraid of crowds.
They do not persecute me,
They do not speak to me,
They only embrace me silently,
Yet they seem menacing the secret part of me.

Great spaces . . .
I am not afraid of the great spaces—
Wide sea-stretches under a moon,
Green glades on mountain summits,
Quiet pathways of the wood.

These hold glad communion with me.

VERMONT IN WINTER

Dry leaves crackle on the ground,
Smoke stares up into the sky.
A blue-jay scurries through the air—
Bare trees shiver sharply—
There is purple haze over the wood,
Stark boughs whimper.

Drear and grim the fields lie
In perpetual chastity.
At night, beneath a white moon
Only the snow comes, cold and silent.

Soon Spring, the lusty-eyed,
Will return, warm and eager,
And woods and meadows
Lit with sudden flame,
Will awaken, quivering with beauty.

SNOW

My heart leaps up in keen delight
When snow is on the meadow white.
When wood and river, hill and stream
In winter's snowy garments gleam.
When shadows blue and purple lie
Across my path and in the sky.
When clouds are of a tinted rose
And clear the twilight hour glows
A misted sapphire over all
Where deep the hemlock shadows fall.

This wind that stirs the pine-tree wood
This wondrous, tranquil solitude
This peace of woodland in the snow
Where no sounds fall, and no storms blow,
Where comes the red moon in the sky
And bright the dreaming meadows lie,
My heart leaps up in keen delight
When snow is on the meadow white.

VOICES OF THE NIGHT

I will listen to the great voices of the night,
Woodland music,
The rustling of silver-toned lyres in the wind;
Beautiful white birch melodies.

Great voices of the summer night
Trees, bending boughs, laden with blossoms
Where the wind plays like lovers' caresses,
Under the white dreaming moon.

My bed will be among singing voices of the night,
In the scent of blossoms, spruce and laurel,
And the harp-songs of the woodland
Will lull me to perfect slumber.

URGENCE

Great cliffs tear asunder,
Great tides bear under.

Time, space, quicken me
With the urgence of the sea,

As waves lash the shore
And their beauty pour,

So let me quicken under
Great tides that tear asunder,

Seeking ever higher, higher
With a burning, quenchless fire,

Never content to lie
Beneath an indifferent sky.

Keen as a flashing star,—
As glowing craters are,—

God, keep my heart alight
With fires burning bright . . .

SPRING CHORAL

The little green things of the wood,
They fill with joy my solitude.

They fold me in a soft embrace
That I may look on beauty's face.

Each tiny bud a message has,
And on the scented, swaying grass

Bright-colored birdlings soar and sing
A choral of the dawning Spring.

The crocus, with its gilded cup,
From mossy banks, looks laughing up,

The boughs are murmuring in the breeze
Their immemorial melodies.

The pulse of forest minstrelsy
In throbbing chorus over me,

I hear the ages of the earth
Speak forth in glorious re-birth!

APRIL

Take hope, O world, and hear:
For Spring is hovering like a fairy near!

Take hope, O heart of mine—
The blue-birds twitter in the budding vine.

The river's eager song—
The plover's note that lingers sweet and long;

The joyous springing green,
The wind's kiss, intimately keen:

The willow's amber plume,
The peach and alder bush a-bloom—

The maple's span of red—
The silvery trout deep in the riverbed:

Spring's voice is on the breeze—
Take hope, O heart, in all of these.

Undercurrent

UNDERCURRENT

Beauty lies deep
In a long sleep.
Violets under snow,
Hopes, dreams,
The flow
Of hidden streams
Beneath the sod,
Silent buried things
Without wings
Which are of God.

Beauty lies deep
In a long sleep
In the bosom of earth
Before having birth,
An unblown rose
With the worm lies close.
A star, fallen from the height
Drowns in the night
And lies deep
In a long sleep.

Beauty lies deep
In a long sleep.
The heart's secret room,
Seeds that never bloom;
Gnarléd roots of trees,
The ocean's arteries
Flowing alone.
Beneath gray stone
(Earth their bed)
The silent dead.

WILDNESS

Love forged for me a golden chain
To bind my straying feet;
I dwelt in scented rose-leaf rain
And found the young years sweet.

But when I hear the wind sweep by
Or see the white clouds pass
The spaces of the open sky
Birds soaring on the grass—

There is a little place in me
That cries like any child
To be as forest things are, free,
Lonely, and strange and wild.

ENCHANTED

Mountains mirrored in a lake,
Cloud-shadows on the sea,
Moonlight on the snow,
Rainbow-banners,
The sky from heather downs.

Bird songs on the wind,
Music over water,
Valleys from a wild glen,
Echoed laughter,
Beauty that has tears.

Stars through a mist,
Butterfly wings in a flower,
Love's first kiss,
Youth's golden threshold:
These are enchanted things.

ECHO

Give beauty:
It will be yours
As the tide returns
To the moors.

Give goodness:
As a shell
It will hold
Music audible.

Give truth:
You will be
By the white hands of truth
Set free.

Give song:
And you will hear
Melody
From sphere to sphere.

Imaged, we see
All things divine;
Give, and they shall be
Yours, and mine.

BEYOND

Beyond I dream, ever beyond
What land lies there?
Not this meadow, not this stream,
Not this golden air.
. . . Beyond I dream, ever beyond,
Is it a mist, a dream,
What strange flight, by starry night,
By what gray waters' gleam?

Beyond I dream, ever beyond
Unto a fastness fair
Where I may wander wild and free
Of loveliness aware.
Beyond I dream, ever beyond,
Not this meadow, not this stream,
Not this golden air . . .

UNUTTERED

These things men know
  But speak not, being dead;
Warmth turning into snow,
  Love words unsaid.

These things men keep
  Still in the tomb:
Sorrow that was too deep,
  Swiftness of bloom.

These things men died
  Without having told:
Tears that were shed alone,
  Love that grows old . . .

SOURCE

All things from woman's labors are:
The hearth, the child, the dream, the dancing star.

All earth is fruit of woman's toil,
She shapes the seed of man in her own soil.

Birth, life, and love, and vast eternity
Are all in her; in her all things may be.

Through her the generations roll.
She is the cause, the urge, the final goal.

She is the fount; and at her call
The race flows on, the ages rise and fall.

TAPESTRY

Life is a strange tapestry
  Of desire and tears.
We weave the colored hours
  The colored years.

Life is a strange pattern
  Of sorrow and delight,
We are the quiet weavers
  In the night.

We trace curious figures
  As we go,
Like wandering footprints
  In the snow.

But there is no changing
  The patterns which we weave.
Only a colored background
  When we leave.

UNKNOWN

Women, no man has loved . . .
Who have never known the wild hands of love,
Who never felt their veins on fire
With great desire,
Who never had a lover bend above.

Women, no man has loved
What is your crown for loneliness?
What compensation do you own
For no caress,
For motherhood you have not known?

(When the moon is risen white
I wonder do you weep alone at night?)

AT DEATH

Am I to cross the great divide
And learn what is on the other side?

Is it beautiful and serene,
Blue skies and meadows green?

Is my loved one waiting there,
Calm, and clad in azure air?

Does she like a seraph stand
Ready to take me by the hand?

Will the going quiet be
Across what hills and what far sea?

Am I to cross the great divide
And learn what is on the other side . . .

OLD WOMEN

These women have known the passing of love,
  The fading of delight,
I see it in their eyes above
  Faces drawn and white.

These women have felt youth
  In their hearts die.
These women know truth,
  Desire has passed them by.

These women understand
  What I have never known.
(But some day their cold secret
  Will come to me, alone.)

ROVER

I am made for the free ways that lead to the uttermost sea;
The wild ways, the salt sprays, and mist upon the lea.

For my heart is ever a rover, and who would own me so,
I am the storms that hover, I am the winds that blow.

I am made for the wild ways that stretch to infinite space,
And none can chain me ever, for I walk in the wind's embrace.

A tame thing I can never be, nor a wife to any man,
For the heat of the sun is in my veins, the sun's flaming span.

Oh, I will go the wild ways that flow to the uttermost sea,
And none there are can tether or stay the flight of me!

PENNSYLVANIA STATION

I, returning alone to the city at midnight,
The station a-glow with eager faces
And the sound of happy voices.
Lovers meeting after long absence
Walking away hand in hand through the darkness,
Men and women, laughing, embracing,
Glad of home after the long journey,
Happy at finding a loved one waiting.

I, returning alone to the city at midnight . . .
No one waiting to greet me or smile on me,
Only the thunder of city noises swelling about me,
Only the pitiless city staring before me,
Only the menacing labyrinth of streets and shadows.

TRUNK-MAN

His face seemed to say:
"It is not worth the money,
I am dying on the job,
I've been carrying trunks on my back for
twenty years
And my body aches from its burden.
For God's sake let me out of this prison
called life!"

WHY POETS SING

We were made for pain,
  Never for delight.
Joy is a lovely thing
  That shines in the night.

We were made for tears,
  Never for laughter;
But the bright rainbow
  We followed after!

We were made for pain
  Who loved glad things.
Joy is silent—
  Pain sings.

ATAVISM

It will come about eventually,
I cannot be this ordered self forever.

Like the rumble of guns
From afar . . .

I am tired of mating and meandering,
I want the yellow canyons of desire.

I will be no placid thing,
But a restless eagle in space.

Threshing is better than sowing,
I have spread seeds too long.

Now there is rich harvest of the unknown
Riot and strange thoroughfares.

There is din of thunder
And storm on the air.

Like the rumble of guns from afar,
I cannot be this ordered self forever!

GENESIS

I.

Wild things are tamed by kindness.
Homing pigeons know
That warmth and quiet wait
When the long pilgrimage is past.
Flowers and grass
Are glad of sunshine;
And trees
Peer high into the sky
For glimpses of the stars and cooling rain.
Birds go southward many miles
To find the tropics,
And the sea
Laves the broad shore
That it may know
Warm pulses of the earth,
And in the Spring
The glory of the budding world
Is nursed by kindly light.

II.

. . . Perhaps this healing thing
Called kindness
Is but God . . .
The invisible power that builds the earth,
The invisible hand that swings the planets,
The invisible source of the sun's warmth,
The invisible urge that stirs the sap,
Which dies not, being immortality.

III.

So, when I ask of you, Belovéd,
Only a small thing, kindness,
Perhaps I ask too much—
If it be God!

MY SPRINGER SPANIEL

Patient and wise, with wisdom born of love,
Gentle as April winds that woo the air,
Faithful as stars within the heavens fair,
Kind as the ageless sun that shines above,
Content with little; asking not to rove,
A nature soft and mild, the will to dare
Yet never to forsake the master's care,
Brave with a courage Time alone did prove.

Why have you virtue which no men possess,
Devotion unto death; the patient ways
That are not of this world,—a heart so true
It knows not any guile or selfishness
Nor asks for favors, nor for any praise,—
Oh, men are nobler for a friend like you!

FRUSTRATION

The years are frustration
A blind alley in the wind,
A puff of fireworks
And who would have it over again?

They say ghosts come back . . .
I am sure I would not,
Nor would any one else.
Why re-live a vanquished dream?

The years are frustration.
In the faces of all people
The longing, the desperate desire for what is not,
Dumb groping for the impossible.

In each silent heart
There is a buried wish,
A thwarted dream—
A wild-bird note unuttered.

So unto the end
Down darkened valleys
To the final goal—
Dust and frustration.

A MOTHER TO HER SON

Now my life passes into yours . . .
You, my son, bearer of the generations,
You, to whom the ages sing their challenge,
You, to whom the future summons smiling,
You, in whose veins flow my own imperious
passions,
You, for whom beauty beckons like a moon-star
Down long paths of dream and loveliness.

Now my life passes into you—
You, the bearer of the generations,
You, the consummation of my youth,
You, the torch of my immortality!

Daffodils

"Make us glad according to the days
wherein thou hast afflicted us."

Psalm 90:15

I.

The earth had never been so bright
As when she died that still May night.

The apple-boughs were laden white
And on the fields a clear, calm light.

The earth had never been so bright
As when she died that still May night . . .

II.

I gave her daffodils the day she died . . .
  One golden flower, so beautiful apart
  Made a brief smile upon her dear lips start.
And when she asked me, kneeling at her side,
Where the flower had grown, I said: "Upon a wide
  Steep bank where amber river's racing dart,"
A little joy sprang up and did abide.

Dear daffodils to bring her this delight
  The last, sweet joy that she will ever know,
    A happy smile upon her perfect face,
One star to guide her in the endless night,
  One hour of beauty in a golden glow—
    A glimpse that came to her of heavenly space.

III.

She was so happy those last hours with me
  As if the angels might be hovering here,
  As if the light of heaven did appear
To bring her calm and set her poor heart free—
Her weary heart so tired of misery
  So long imprisoned by a desolate fear;
  It was as though she heard sweet music near
In those last hours of our felicity.

She told me of the beauty of the world,
  Of loved ones, and of all my love for her,
    And of my long devotion in her pain,
It was as if life's bounty were unfurled
  And in our hearts we felt great wonder stir.
    (I never saw her blesséd face again.)

IV.

Though spring returns it cannot bring her face
  Lost loveliness that lies beneath the dew,
  Lost beauty which I mourn each day anew,
Dear smiling eyes and body I did embrace,
Dear silvery hair in its white bower of lace.
  And though the meadows have a shining hue
  And boughs are blooming and the sky is blue
Will there be May again in any place?

Though spring in wonder dances at my door,
  Though birds may sing, and earth put on gay
    dress,
  And there is lit great luminance in the night,
For me there is no beauty any more,
  For me there never can be happiness,
    The world has now forever lost its light.

V.

So does the world go on without her here . . .
  Wondering, I look upon the unfolding Spring,
  Wondering, I hear the blue-birds as they sing,
Watching the pageant of the beauteous year
Knowing she never will again be near,
  Knowing her voice is still, and nought can
    bring
  Her beauty back to my heart sorrowing.
Wondering I see the morning light appear.

How can the earth be lovely with her gone?
  How can the sun arise anew each day,
    The earth revolve and all the stars grow
      bright
When she will come no more at any dawn,
  When she went from me in an hour of May
    Leaving me lonely in eternal night!

VI.

Spring came to perfect bloom the day she died
  As if to crown her final resting-place
  As if to fill the earth with deeper grace
So she might lie with beauty there beside.
The birds were singing and the fields were pied
  With colored flowers, and I saw a trace
  Of greater wonder in the blue sky's face
When she went forth to silence deep and wide.

Spring had not come until that night of May
  When she was taken far from me alone,
    When last I saw her smile into my eyes,
But in that moment a radiant array
  Of wonder dawned which earth had never
    known,
    (In beauty's hour I heard her spirit rise).

VII.

Grief is such a lonely thing,
There is no voice answering.

Grief is such a silent hour.
Dead roses in a bower.

Grief is such a shadowed way
Veiled is the light of day.

Nothing comes in the dark gloom—
Not even Spring bloom,

Nor is there any hand
To touch in this cold land.

To weep alone. Who hears . . .
What is the use of tears?

VIII.

She would wish me to go
Onward so
Unto the end . . .
To all mankind friend
Loving and good
In brotherhood.

Did I not know this—
That she wished me brave—
I would lie on her grave
And death would be sweet like a lover's kiss.

IX.

Will laughter ever come again—
Or only heavy pain?

Will youth ever singing be
As before she went from me?

Will earth ever glow the same
Or the sunset flame—

Or the stars come large and bright,
Or flowers bloom clear and white,

Will I ever lie at night in my bed
Without thinking of the loving words she said,

Will I ever awake, or sleep or pray
Without needing her any day?

X.

That last evening I did not kiss her, so
I did not dream it was her hour to go.

That last evening she was so glad and bright
How could I know she would be called in the night?

That last evening she had a happy smile.
Hardly I thought she would be gone in a little while.

That last evening I did not kiss her so
Hardly I dreamed it was her hour to go. . .

XI.

Now do I feel no more the piercing pain
  Which was her death. It is a sacred thing
  As if her spirit spoke on soaring wing
Saying, "I am at rest." So I regain
An ancient calm like some soft, sweet refrain.
  Oh, there is end of all her suffering
  For on a scented evening in the Spring
She was removed from life's long weary strain.

Nor do I find rebellion in my heart
  Which yesterday fought like a prisoned bird
    Against the awful and unyielding bar
Of silence and despair. But now apart
  As if her spirit singing I had heard,
    As one in God forever so we are.

XII.

Grief turns from mad despair
  Into a sacred thing.
  As the wild storm that lays the woodland bare
  Leaves in its wake a bird on lifted wing,
And Spring.

XIII

Blossoms have fallen to the sod
And Spring is over . . .
So her loveliness
Has become dust
In the embracing earth.

Pilgrimage

A Sonnet Sequence

PILGRIMAGE

For each of us a different path to God,
The poet by the starway of his dreams
Or yet perhaps the sound of singing streams
May lead to hidden pinnacles untrod.
The lover finds in love the magic rod
Which wafts him upward. And a beauty gleams
Sometimes in strang and unseen ways. It seems
We go our way upon the flowering sod

Seeking forever an invisible goal,
For deeper beauty always hungering,
Yet never nearing the desiréd height,
For hidden it waits beyond us, and the whole
Of life is but a pilgrimage, to wring
From chaos one star burning in the night.

ALTARS

The fleetingness of beauty fills my heart
With wondering sadness on this April day.
The willow's bloom, a quivering golden spray,
The lilac boughs that in the woodland start,
Why is this visible loveliness a part
Of things that perish? If I could but stay
The rainbow or the early rose, and say:
"These perfect things die not." How glad my heart!

And yet, this beauty which is mine to hold,
The moment's ecstasy, the quickening sense
Of birdsong, moonrise on a pine-clad lea,
The cup of dawn tip-tilted, clear and gold,
These die . . . but they are mortal recompense
For earth, the altars of Eternity.

POSSESSION

"Poets see with the eyes of childhood."
Daudet.

Let me not lose too soon my childhood eyes
And go unseeing in the crowded ways,
No longer in great wonder and amaze,
No longer treading where the starlight lies.
I would not give up beauty to be wise
And grow unmindful of the April days,
Peach-bud in bloom, a blue-bird's rapturous lays,
A crescent moon at twilight in the skies.

Keep simple, heart of mine, quick moved to tears,
Trustful of men, not filled with great desire,
Going the way the faithful ones have trod,
Or as a young lamb fares upon the meres,
Not burning with the world's embattled fire,
But humble when I go to meet my God.

FOR TRUTH

I have a faithful lover to the last,
  Down through the ages he has come to me
  Like sudden moon upon a troubled sea
Speaking of centuries forever past,
And risen majestic from the buried vast,
  Bearing within his heart eternity,
  And when his noble countenance I see
Oh, I am calm and peace is come at last.

O Truth, you are my lover. I am yours.
  In flesh and spirit I hold you to my heart,
    (Faithful you are as mortals never are)
In a passion that forevermore endures,
  In a passion that is of my life a part,
    And eternal as the eons of a star! . . .

So shall it be unto the final end . . .
  Sense against sense, soul striving upon soul
  In this embattled way which is the whole
Of human love. One day I am his friend
And there is truce; the battle lines suspend:
  Then we are driven forth upon a shoal
  From calmer seas. Once more the ageless goal
Of passion looms ahead. We cannot blend.

Oh, lovers are not indivisible,
  Nor perfect is their ardent unison,
    For love is only an eternal strife
And kisses but the fiery truths that tell
  Of cataclysm. We are never one
    But eager enemies in this passionate life.

DEEP

O Self, fare onward to the august deep,
  Rest not within the shadows of the shore;
  Small pools are shallow, and no beauty store
While distant depths a greater wisdom keep
To stir the spirit from its earthly sleep.
  The unplumbed ocean has a splendor more,
  Great melody is in the mid-sea's roar,
Fare onward, Self, unto the august deep.

O Self, stay not within a splacid sea
  But pass to greater depths of thought and pain
    Where men have still the fiery crown of truth,
The wisdom which is of eternity
  Beyond the stars, an infinite refrain—
    The love that lit the faithful heart of Ruth . . .

"MY LOVER'S BEAUTY"

My lover's beauty is a thing of fear,
  As mountains peer aloft in mighty space,
  Or as one looks upon the wide sky's face
Sensing infinitude. When he is near
The shadows of eternity are here
  And vistas of the sublime in his embrace,
  Strange, silent intimations which I trace
In his beauty which is graver year by year.

Strange loveliness of love, strange terror too,
  Death is not stranger than my lover's face,
    O beauty that is terrible as fire,
As grave as sea-depths, old yet ever new,
  Piercing as pain; sweet as a scented place.
    (Men died for Helen's beauty once in Tyre.)

"WHEN THESE KEEN FIRES"

When these keen fires within my body die
  And calm age gravely folds me to its breast,
  Will there be found for me an ultimate rest
Within the spirit's sanctuary held most high,
Or will I wander lonely with a cry
  Missing the magic of the ancient quest—
  Love's golden hours that were forever best,
Love's golden hours that soon must pass me by.

O Body, I wonder have I loved too well
  The things of passionate beauty which you gave
    And when I come to part with your delight,
The quickening rapture and the pulses swell,
  I wonder will I richer be . . . or slave
    To your old voices calling in the night?

"HOW LONG THIS LITTLE SPAN"

How long this little span of human things
  Before I find release in infinite space,
  Before I meet great silence face to face,
Knowing the source from which my spirit springs,
Braving the darkness which has shining wings
  Released from turmoil and man's fretful pace,
  Released to drift in quietude's embrace,
Tranquil and calm with great foreshadowings.

How long this little hour of life is mine,
  So quick with sorrow and bewilderment,
    Colored with dreams and smitten with great pride.
Seeking for truth and for the things divine;
  With weariness and great desire spent—
    Until the unknown portal opens wide.

"ALL BEAUTEOUS THINGS"

Oh, I have loved too much all beauteous things:
  Wind on the meadow, and the summer rain,
  Cloud-shadows passing on a field of grain,
Glad glowing earth, and every flower that springs,
Great archéd trees, and each glad bird that sings;
  The violet nightfall, and the sunset-stain;
  White banks of cloud, a river's soft refrain,
All wild sweet sounds and scents the woodland brings,

Oh, I have found much loveliness in these;
  Friendship in grass, and wonder in the sky,
    Green boughs and swaying briers, a mountain haze;
Bird notes at twilight, pine-scent on the breeze,
  Beauty that shall be mine until I die—
    A crown for my inconsequential days.

TREASURES

These things I would not speak of unto death:
The kiss of my first lover in the Spring,
A blue-bird's note at twilight, spreading wing,
The silent voice of forests. The sweet breath
Of earth after a shower. A heather heath
When dusk and starlight both are lingering.
Thoughts of my childhood which the long hours bring,
These things I would not speak of unto death:

My mother's lips in her last, fond farewell;
Leave-taking of my youth; the tremulous hour
When deep within me came the stir of birth;
Sad moments when Love from its summit fell . . .
These sacred things that are the heart's still flower,
The deep, unuttered treasures of the earth.

TRAVAIL

The deep, unuttered agony of earth
  Man in his travail to the uttermost star,
  The toll of sorrow following from afar
The throe which is mortality and birth,
Oh, endless is the burden, and no mirth
  Of youth or time can finally unbar
  The door to peace. In thraldom all things are,
From pole to pole pain spreads its fiery girth.

All living things come forth in silent pain,
  In pang of earth all beauty has been born
    And in death's dark, inevitable hour
Pain stands a silent sentinel again.
  For heavy is the yoke that man has worn
    And ageless is his dream of peace or power.

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